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ABSTRACT

Evaluators frequently experience the dilemma of how to empower a program staff if the staff and other stakeholders are compelled to participate in activities that they don't believe they need or believe may actually harm the program. A framework is proposed to empower program staff and other stakeholders and to reduce potential dilemmas. The framework is based on the concepts of power, resistance, reactance, and principled negotiation. This framework emerged in the evaluation of the Families Assisting Confined Elderly Project (FACE). The goal of the FACE project is to maximize the independence of the frail elderly through adoption by a family group to be the elder's extended family. Approaches used by the evaluator attempt to create a relationship in which concerns are shared, common interests of the evaluator and program staff are identified, and a power-sharing relationship is implemented. When resistance surfaces, resistance and contributing factors need to be explored. Evaluators must consider the reasonableness of evaluation requirements, the responsibilities of program staff, the extent of the staff's understanding of the evaluation, and the limits of the staff's right to make decisions about program futures. (Contains 11 references.) (SLD)

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IF THEY DON'T WANT TO PLAY THE EVALUATION GAME,

ARE THEY EMPOWERED BY MAKING THE RULES?

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Introduction

Evaluators committed to empowerment through evaluation, providing stakeholders the opportunity to gain greater mastery over their program environment, face dilemmas and hazards in working with program staff. For evaluators, these dilemmas compound the difficulty of working with program staff who consider an evaluation of their program as an intrusion (Fein, Staff, and Kobylenski, 1993). Oten program staff attempts to change the evaluation in ways that they believe protect their programs, and evaluators find that these changes compromise the evaluation's rigor and integrity. Evaluators experience a dilemma. How can they empower a program staff if the staff and other stakeholders are compelled to participate in activities that they don't believe they need, or believe may harm their program?

For evaluators, two sets of values are in conflict. First, empowerment in evaluation involves making it possible for staff and stakeholders to learn from and contribute to the evaluation. Staff do more than provide data. They function as consultants to evaluators informing them about the unique aspects of the program. The information provided by staff is used by the evaluator to decide on the appropriate evaluation methods. Second, the evaluator has a duty to conduct as rigorous and independent an evaluation as possible. Difficulties occur when evaluators solicit staff participation, but do not use their ideas. There is the danger that the program staff will see the evaluator as manipulative and dishonest.

Purpose and Rationale

The author proposes a framework to empower program staff and other stakeholders and to reduce the potential dilemmas of empowerment in evaluation. It is a framework based on the concepts of power, resistance, reactance, and principled negotiation. Empowerment evaluation requires that evaluators possess an understanding of the sources of power, knowledge of the methods that promote power-sharing relationships with program staff, and the skills to resolve conflicts. It is proposed that the use of this framework has additional benefits. Its use increases the likelihood that conflicts between evaluators and program staff will be resolved in a way that empowers staff and maintains the integrity of the evaluation.

Method

This empowerment framework has emerged through reflection on practice. Schoen (1983) indicates that practioners use reflection to gain practical competence and professional artistry in handling problematic situations. The professional practioner, according to Schoen, is a specialist who repeatedly encounters certain types of situations. Evaluators are professional practioners engaged in practice with recurrent methodological and interpersonal interaction problems. It is reflection on practice that enables practioners to develop solutions and refine their practice principles about what works and under what conditions.

This empowerment framework has emerged in the evaluation of the Families Assisting Confined Elderly Project (FACE). The FACE

Project's goal is to maximize the independence of the frail elderly. FACE Project elders are at-risk of placement in nursing homes because of physical disabilities, depression, and social isolation. Through the FACE Project, a family group adopts a senior and functions as the elder's extended family. FACE families regularly visit their adopted elders, and monitor their elders' health and care.

Power and Empowerment in Evaluation

To understand the ways that evaluation facilitates the empowerment of program staff, it is essential to understand power, and the sources of power in the relationship between the evaluator and program staff. Power is the capacity of individuals to exert control over their environment. It includes the capacity to influence others to behave in certain ways. French and Raven (1977) identify five sources of social power. These sources of power are applied to program evaluation:

> **reward power** is based on the evaluator's capacity, or the perception by staff that the evaluator has the capacity to bestow rewards on the program;
>
> **coercive power** is based on the evaluator's capacity, or perception by program staffthat the evaluator has the capacity to harm the program if they do not cooperate with the evaluation;
>
> **legitimate power** or positional power is based on the perception by the program staff that the evaluator has the authority and right to require that the program staff engage in certain behaviors such as collecting data for the evaluation;
>
> **referent power** is based on the program staff's identification with the evaluator. Identification takes place through the process of attraction. Attraction is based on such factors as the confidence that the evaluator inspires in the staff, the evaluator's dynamism, and or the personal or professional

similarities between the staff and the evaluator;

expert power is based on the evaluator's special knowledge, or the perception by the program staff that the evaluator has some special knowledge or skills. The program staff assesses the evaluator's expertise in relation to their own knowledge and skills.

Hersey and Blanchard (1982) identify two additional bases of power that the staff or evaluator may possess.

information power is based on the access to valuable information. The evaluator possess information power in that he/she has specialized knowledge about program evaluation. Program staff possess information power in that they are knowledgeable about program functions; and

connection power is based on individuals' association with influential people, or the perception of close ties to influential people. For example, the program evaluator is often closely associated with program funding sources. Program staff may also possess connection power in that the program may have powerful supporters.

Differences in Sources and Levels of Power

Evaluators and program staff differ in their sources of power and levels of power. Evaluators have positional, reward, and coercive power. They can require program staff to provide data, and influence the program's resources and survival. Evaluators possess expert knowledge about program evaluation and the program intervention model. Frequently, evaluators exercise a high degree of power over the program staff because they represent prestigious or powerful entities such as the funding agency, consulting firms, universities or government agencies.

Program staff also possess power. They possess expert, connection power and information power. Staff have knowledge and experience with the specific program's clients and program context at a depth and breadth that the evaluator may not possess. In

addition, staff influences the public perception of the evaluator. These perceptions affect the evaluator's reputation and livelihood. Most staff exercise information power in that they can facilitate or impede the evaluator's access to information about the program.

Power and Resistance

French and Raven identify several hypothesis about the consequences of using specific kinds of power. These hypotheses connect power to resistance, and explain the responses of program staff to evaluation. For example, referent power, on average, has the broadest range of influence. If the program staff have confidence in the evaluator or trust the evaluator, they are more likely to cooperate with the evaluator's requests. Using coercion, on the other hand, results in high resistance. However, the use of coercive power combined with legitimate power is less likely to produce resistance. Reward power results in less resistance. Staff's resistance to an evaluation may be perceived by an evaluator as a staff's effort to hide a poor program. A staff may resist an evaluation because their autonomy is threatened. For example, evaluators may ask staff to do tasks that they find uncomfortable such as asking clients questions that staff would rather not ask.

Staff resistance manifests itself in a variety of ways. Scriven (1993) observes that program staff will lie, cheat and deceive evaluators. Behaviors indicating resistance include:

- minimizing problems or claiming miraculous improvements in the program,
- being tardy for appointments or forgetting, changing or repeatedly canceling appointments,
- threatening by suggesting that someone in power will not approve of the evaluation requirements,
- trying to invoke guilt through , "see what you are making me do, or see what you are making our clients do," and
- refusing and attacking

Reactance Theory

Rooney's reactance theory when applied to staff behavior explains staff behavior as a response to the loss of valued freedoms. When individuals experience a threat to valued freedoms, they often respond in one of five ways: they seek to restore their freedom despite the consequences, show hostility or aggressions toward the threatening source even when such efforts are unlikely to remove the threat, find a loophole or technically comply with regulations while violating other norms that were not expressly prohibited, attempt to incite others to perform forbidden behaviors. To the extent that program staff see the evaluation as a threat, these behaviors are exhibited. These behaviors are most likely to occur when an evaluation is externally mandated.

The Empowerment Framework

Evaluators concerned with empowerment face a dual task: to work with program staff in a way that empowers them, and to fulfill the demands of the evaluation. This empowerment framework assists evaluators in accomplishing both tasks. The framework consists of

three dimensions: a perspective regarding staff, approaches or techniques, and skills. The perspective is based on a recognition of the power, resistance, and loss of freedom concerns that program staff experience in an evaluation. This perspective guides evaluators behavior. A first step for evaluators in empowerment evaluation is to acknowledge the staff's power. They are knowledgeable about their program and the context in which that program operates. In the FACE Project, program staff were very concerned about being recognized as experts. They were carrying out successful programs for the elderly and saw themselves as understanding the needs of the target population, the frail elderly.

Approaches

The approaches used by the evaluator in this framework have as their objective creating a relationship in which concerns are shared, the common interests and common goals of the evaluator and program staff identified, and a power-sharing relationship implemented. Creating a climate where program staff can express concerns rather than passively resist involves frequent and regular discussion with the program staff, individually and as a group. If staff do not express their concerns directly, they are likely to express their resistance indirectly by actions that sabotage the evaluation. When resistance surfaces, the resistance and the contributing factors need to be explored. Evaluators cannot always assume that staff are unwilling to share information, or have something to hide.

To handle resistance, the evaluator and staff need to explore their respective frames-of-reference. For example, in the FACE Project, staff disliked collecting data. According to the staff, the interviews were time consuming, made the elderly clients uncomfortable, and reduced the time available to provide the clients with services. The evaluator saw the data collection as a tool to improve services to the seniors. Nonetheless, the evaluator took the staff concerns seriously. Although the evaluator had pretested the instruments and consulted with gerontologists, the evaluator investigated the staff's concerns about the impact of the interviews on the program's senior clients. The evaluator retested the instruments with seniors, revisited the literature, consulted again with experts in gerontology, and invited the staff to do the same. No evidence was discovered that seniors were hurt or distressed by the instruments. The evaluator reminded staff that according to the evaluation protocol seniors clients should be informed that they did not have to answer questions they did not want to answer. Rather than try to persuade the program staff about the evaluation's long term benefits to the seniors, the evaluator helped the program staff reframe the data collection as part of the program intervention. When program staff could view the time spent in data collection as time spent in reducing the seniors' isolation, the staff found the interviews more acceptable.

Empowerment evaluation requires a relationship between equals and the sharing of power. In an empowerment evaluation, the relationship between evaluator and staff is characterized by

reciprocity, open communication, and negotiation. For example, evaluators establish reciprocal relationships when they make their performance as perceived by the staff part of the evaluation report. The benefits of this approach affect the working relationship and the evaluation in a direct way. By evaluating the evaluator, the evaluator gains the program staff's trust, shows that he/she has an investment in the program beyond "getting the data," and brings out into the open the feelings that program staff may have about the evaluation and the evaluator. Program staff also learn through this approach. They learn that evaluation too should be held to standards of quality, and about the criteria to use in assessing an evaluator's performance. These criteria include whether program staff thought that the evaluator encouraged their participation in the evaluation, took seriously their concerns about the evaluation, and when disagreements occurred sought a solution that met both their interests. It is important that the evaluator clearly state that the positive or negative evaluation results are not part of the criteria for judging an evaluator's performance.

Implementing empowerment in evaluation requires that the evaluator address the staff's interests and concerns. For example, the evaluator can address the performance anxiety experienced by staff, the sense that the evaluator is looking over their shoulder and judging their performance. Evaluators can frame their role as that of concerned observers. When evaluators advise program staff of their desire to see programs succeed, it helps reduce the

tension that evaluations produce in the relationship between staff and evaluator. It may also be helpful to encourage staff to reframe the evaluator's role to that of a coach's role (Hendricks 1993). Evaluators, like coaches, focus on evaluating the team's performance, and have an interest in seeing the program succeed. Evaluators can help program staff view the evaluation not as a situation in which they lose power, but trade power in the evaluation to gain tangible and immediate benefits. These benefits are not necessarily those related to the evaluation results. For example, in the FACE Project, the program staff was interested in the computer software that was being installed to analyze the Project's data. The software would facilitate the staff's work in other areas. The software was relevant to the program staff's needs and helped decrease the staff's resistance to collecting data. If they didn't collect the data, the staff wouldn't need the software.

Skills

Evaluators interaction with program staff and other stakeholders is the medium by which empowerment in evaluation takes place. Appropriate skills include those that evaluators use to facilitate participation in the evaluation, build and sustain power-sharing relationships. Group facilitation skills, consensus building, and principled negotiation skills are particularly appropriate. In principled negotiation, the parties settle disagreements using criteria or merits rather than on haggling between the parties on what each part will or will not do (Fisher

& Ury 1982). Principled negotiation focuses on satisfying the interests of the parties, and on resolving the conflict in a way that preserves the relationship between the parties. Principled negotiation is preferable to compromise in many conflicts. When evaluators and program staff compromise, the danger exists that neither party will be satisfied with the result and that the conflict will resurface.

The Limitations of Empowerment

This empowerment framework has limitations to its use. Among the limitations are the following:

Uniformity and Uniqueness- Empowerment evaluation is most consistent with evaluation approaches that can capture the unique context of a program. Qualitative approaches are appropriate in evaluations that identify and describe the unique aspects and context of a program. Quantitative approaches using standardized measures, while useful in comparing results across programs, are less compatible with the empowerment framework.

Empowerment Evaluation and Time- Empowerment evaluation requires engaging program staff as partners and negotiating with them. Negotiation and consensus building are time consuming activities. Most evaluators work within limited time frames. Deadline pressures encourage evaluators to conduct evaluations that resemble audits.

Dilemmas of Empowerment- Empowerment evaluation leads to dilemmas for evaluators when program staff determine, that despite making the evaluation rules, they don't want to play the evaluation

game. If the program staff participates in the evaluation, they do so only because they are coerced by the consequences of not complying with the evaluation. Evaluators facing a resistant program staff are caught in a dilemma of competing values: the valuing of program staff's autonomy and knowledge about the clients that they serve, and the demands of professional practice and to the interests of those sponsoring the evaluation. In resolving the dilemma, the evaluators need to consider not only the interests and responsibilities to those sponsoring the evaluation but to consider as well:

1) the reasonableness of the evaluation requirements,

2) the responsibilities and obligations that program authorities have to those sponsoring the evaluation,

3) the extent to which program staff understand the program evaluation and can make an informed decision about the evaluation, and

4) the limits of the program staff's right to make make decisions that will affect the future of the program.

In the FACE Project, one agency withdrew from the Project due largely to the requirements of the evaluation for impact data.

Summary

Empowerment evaluation differs from other evaluation models in its perspective, and general approaches. The empowerment framework is based on a belief about the connection between the participation of program staff and the production of an evaluation that is informative and useful. It is also a strategy to reduce resistance and reactance among program staff. Empowerment in evaluation is characterized by a power-sharing relationship between the evaluator and program staff. When evaluation empowers, staff and other stakeholders have increased in their ability and willingness to use evaluation as tool to improve programs.

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